

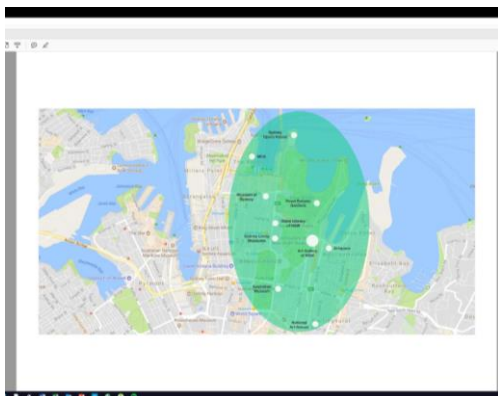
## INTRODUCTION

1. These are Grounds of Objection to what is called the “Sydney Modern Project”, State Significant Development DA SSD 6471 3/11/17.
2. I endorse the objections also made by Chesterman *et al*, including without limitation as to the absurdly constrained deadline for filing objections when compared to the years that the AGNSW has had to generate invariably favourable reports.
3. Before turning to the detail of the objections, I will set out an overall summary and raise some threshold points.

### Tendentious and exaggerated terminology

4. A feature of the AGNSW’s, and now the Government’s, pronouncements and propaganda about this project has been the use of repeated exaggeration, repeated falsehoods, and fabricated visual aids. The approval process should ensure that it strips away that nonsense and looks at the actual facts.
5. The very name “Sydney Modern” is worthy of Dr Goebbels. It is a cringe-worthy imitation of “Tate Modern”. It does not reflect any intention that the extensions be devoted to modern art. It reeks of invention by some sort of PR consultant. In this submission it will be abbreviated to “**SM**”.
6. The same applies to the slogan that is persistently deployed in a somewhat Orwellian fashion that this project is about “transforming the Art Gallery of New South Wales into one of the world’s great art museums”. That claim is embarrassing and ludicrous. A plan to tack on some undistinguished pavilions, reminiscent of a regional airport, to a hotchpotch of (mostly) badly designed, badly managed, indeed “under utilised” (of which more shortly) spaces, to hold a perfectly charming and indeed admirable collection of works that, delightful as it is, and valuable as it is to Sydney’s life, could barely rise into the third rank of collections worldwide, does not “one of the world’s great art museums” make. One might ask: on what measure? That is a question, by the way, that the AGNSW and its government apologists and sloganeers should, but have not, and cannot, answer.

7. Equally, the AGNSW and those promoting the SM extension engage in frankly ridiculous, self-serving and tendentious diagrams and ideas. We will detail many of these in due course. However, perhaps the most telling and among the most ridiculous examples, which they are using at this very day, is the image from the Gallery's PowerPoint presentation "Transforming the Art Gallery of New South Wales into one of the world's great art museums". That image is as follows:



8. One could more appropriately have centred the diagram on the State Library and thereby included the Maritime Museum, the present Powerhouse Museum, Sydney Theatre Company, the Darling Harbour Entertainment Precincts and, indeed, the Star, the Lyric Theatre of which is an important contributor to the cultural life of the city. Revolving the precinct around the AGNSW is pure invention and artificiality.

#### A history of no real consultation

9. The next point to make is that despite the Gallery's persistent boasts of consultation, there was in fact no consultation whatsoever before major decisions were made. Those key decisions have included:
- (a) the position of the extension on the north side of the existing gallery;
  - (b) the retention of all the newer buildings, some of them excrescences, built over the years 1970-2014, easterly from, and attaching to, the original Vernon building;
  - (c) a rejection of any extension being at a completely different site such as has occurred with eg the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), the Tate Gallery in

London etc. etc; among the reasons given being the point made in para (e) below;

- (d) the decision to invite, and the actual invitation of, a closed list of architects to submit “concept” drawings;
  - (e) a need, said to be an unavoidable necessity, that the new buildings be contiguous with, and share an entrance with, the old buildings.
10. As recently as 2015 these decisions were said to be non-negotiable. But notably, the last “non-negotiable” (para 9(e) above) turned out to be completely disposable, apparently in an attempt (that appears to have been successful) to placate the Hon P.J. Keating. The passionate reasons given for it by former Deputy Director Anne Flanagan – that the extra security costs, staff costs, and the like, would make a “separate building” solution completely unfeasible – turned out to be a flimsy fabrication. For the reasons developed below, so are all the other decisions that have been made.
11. In fact, the AGNSW should have consulted on all those matters long before locking itself into the process and outcome that it has.

Virtually every reason given in support of SM is false or irrelevant

12. The most appropriate, and instructive, way of demonstrating that the SM project is ill-conceived and ought to be refused approval is to note what the AGNSW has offered as reasons for it; and to show why practically all of them are erroneously based if not actually mendacious.
13. Those claims were first made in a 6 March 2013 announcement by Michael Brand and his (then) chairman Steven Lowy announced the new proposal, together with the Newspeak title “Sydney Modern” on 6 March 2013. It was perhaps fitting that Mr Lowy is a shopping centre heir, as the proposal resembled nothing so much as a Westfield mall. Tellingly the name is said to “embody the ambition of the Gallery’s Board of Trustees and its new director Dr Michael Brand to create a truly great art museum which can take its place in the Asian century, in an inter-connected and digitized world”. Meaningless hyperbole. Mr Lowy was quoted as saying “while the Gallery punches well above its weight we have developed this

vision to ensure that it remains relevant ... presenting, preserving and studying art within the disciplines of museology". More impenetrable bureaucratese.

#### The false claim of underutilised land and grassed over concrete spaces

14. They also articulated a "vision statement" that again, is all about their envy of galleries in Canberra, Melbourne and Brisbane and their need for a bigger toy to play with. The first was "a physical transformation" which complements the existing gallery by doubling its size and expanding northwards towards the Harbour to make use of "underutilised land", the existing "land bridge", and space "currently occupied by disused storage tanks". All of that is mendacious Newspeak.
15. The "underutilised land" is green space between the northern façade of the gallery and the beginning of Mrs Macquarie's Road. It was created and dedicated only 18 years ago as inviolable open space, covering over the ugly trench of part of the Cahill Expressway leading into the Eastern Distributor. It is used by people exercising, strolling or just sitting enjoying the view of Woolloomooloo Bay. And as green space does, it rests the eyes even from far away, such as from the Potts Point escarpment.
16. It is the classic cry of an institution wanting to seize public open space to call it "underutilised". By calling it the "land bridge" yet more green space is equally snidely put down, but it again, when dedicated by Bob Carr in 1999 (I was present) was said to be a beautiful new open space connecting the gallery to Mrs Macquarie's Chair and Woolloomooloo, which would be there for the people of Sydney forever.
17. And finally the "space currently occupied by disused storage tanks" is only "underutilised", if you don't count e.g. the large flock of yellow crested cockatoos that make their home there, the many other species of birds that live in the scrub around it, the people who do use it for recreation and if you give no value at all to a soccer-pitch-sized piece of greenery in an increasingly paved-over landscape.
18. In more recent propaganda the AGNSW has said the following:
  - (a) "Currently comprising two grassed concrete platforms – a land bridge (constructed between 1997 and 1999) over the Eastern Distributor and a concrete roof over disused fuel bunkers."

This is typical of the AGNSW propaganda – the two areas concerned are grassy spaces. The fact that the grassed area sits over concrete platforms does not lessen them as open, natural spaces. The fact that the land bridge has only been there since 1999 does not mean the AGNSW can snatch it the more easily. I was Acting Chairman of the Centennial Park & Moore Park Trust during the negotiations that led to the Eastern Distributor; it was part of the trade for the Eastern Distributor which in turn took a slice of couple of hectares of Moore Pak 2 kilometres down the road. Bob Carr said it – answering critics of the Eastern Distributor – this was a compensating benefit it delivered – a grassed land bridge that would be parkland forever.

- (b) “Historic photos show extensive excavation of the site, undertaken to enable construction of the Eastern Distributor following construction of the Cahill Expressway through the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain.”

Showing the excavation of 16 years ago (which looks awful) & not the present swath of green is more tendentious propaganda

- (c) “Approximately 80% of the new building footprint will be located on these existing built structures.”

Tedious repetition worthy of North Korea. They are not “existing built structures”. They are existing grassy open parkland.

#### More space

19. The AGSNW’s 2013 press release went on to boast that after the grab there would be “more space to enable the Gallery to display the full riches of its new collections as well as new acquisitions and major national and international exhibitions”.
20. In order to assess this claim one must first consider the existing hotchpotch of buildings perched where the Domain ends and where the tree line that runs along Mrs Macquarie’s Point begins.
21. That hotchpotch consists of the original Walter Vernon 1909 design, the somewhat brutalist 1972 extension by then government architect Andrew Andersons, and a 1988 extension, the major feature of which is a white luminescent cube. The 1988

eastern extension doubled the size of the gallery. The 2003 Asian gallery added further significant space.

22. Collectively, viewed from Woolloomooloo or Potts Point, the extensions from 1972 through 1988 to 2003 were already a collection of unrelated, unsympathetic, stylistically jarring eyesores. Of those, the only faintly harmonious extension was Mr Andersons' work on the Captain Cook extensions. It is the only part that, along with the Vernon original, should be retained in any redesign.
23. Then in 2008 John Kaldor and his family gave to the Gallery, lock, stock and barrel, 200 contemporary works from the John Kaldor collection. Many of them are, of course, pieces of faddish modern art whose value (aesthetic, cultural and monetary) will rapidly fade. The gift provoked the Gallery to extract funding from the NSW Government for a state-of-the-art off-site storage facility, freeing up space within the existing agglomeration of buildings to display the collection. With further funds donated by the Belgiorino-Nettis family the Gallery whacked on another undistinguished space to the east at the back of the shack.
24. Importantly, however, the Kaldor extension added an entire new floor of 3,300 m<sup>2</sup> of exhibition space. That brought the gallery's total display area to 11,000 m<sup>2</sup>. Put another way, an approximately 7,700 m<sup>2</sup> space was increased to approximately 150% of its former size. Thus exhibition space doubled in 1988, expanded further in 2003, and added another 150% in 2008. For a traditional city-bound gallery, first opened in 1909, that is a very impressive increase over less than 20 years.
25. The further undistinguished Kaldor gallery, tacked onto the last extension down the hill towards Woolloomooloo, was also designed by Mr Andersons. He seems only faintly to support it these days.
26. As pointed out above, the Gallery has doubled its space, then added half again, in less than 20 years. It has held international exhibitions. (The problem is that many have been badly chosen and have flopped.)

Irrelevant but trendy nonsense

27. The next boast is pure management-advisor-speak. It says the project will promote "greater use of technology to better engage audiences from around the world, through a lifelong learning centre as well as through initiatives to better cater for

non English speaking visitors such as Chinese language smartphone apps". (I hope when the non-English speaking visitors learn to speak, they learn not to split infinitives.) About a year ago I went into the gallery and picked up from the front desk, I think still run by the Art Gallery Society, a leaflet for a Chinese-language app about the gallery. It seems that that aim, at least, was achieved without the expenditure of \$400,000,000 dollar, the grabbing of 30,000 m2 of open land, and the destruction of the harbour treeline.

28. Some of the goals were such institutionalized waffle that they are not even remotely reasons for supporting the land grab. An example is "a greater collaboration with international art museums as well as plans to harness the support of Australia's growing and influential expatriate community". ¿Que?

#### The mythology of better connections to the city and the Harbour

29. Next, the plan is supposed to provide "better connections between the gallery and the city via pedestrian access, train and a new ferry wharf at Woolloomooloo". First, in none of the recent travel plans has a ferry wharf at Woolloomooloo been other than a question mark on a map. It now seems completely to have been abandoned. Secondly, pedestrian access from the Gallery to the city is via the Domain or via Art Gallery Road. There is simply no way in which paving over green space and building a gigantic function centre could "provide better connection between the gallery and the city".
30. More recent boasts on the AGNSW website have included that "Public access across the entire site will be maintained day and night and revitalised landscaping reintroducing native species and incorporating outdoor art will improve public amenity." Silly. The area of the land bridge and around the Lincoln Crescent green space is all flourishing native growth already. "Outdoor art" has its place but it does not follow that parkland is improved by it. It may in fact be lessened by it.

#### More visitors

31. Brand and Lowy next boasted of a forecast increase in student visitors from 100,000 to 300,000. I had a meeting with Ann Flanagan, Deputy Director of the Gallery and then responsible for the "Sydney Modern" project, about two years ago. She regarded this need to accommodate an extra 200,000 students a year as a driving force. She did not seem to understand that a time comes for institutions when they simply cannot accommodate all who wish to attend, students

or not. The immensely popular Ghibli Museum in Tokyo, a museum dedicated to a famous anime Manga studio, rations visitors to 100 a day. Galleries in Rome, Florence, Paris, London, and across the US issue tickets on timed basis, and when the day's allocation is sold out that's that.

32. Another reason given by the function centre expansionists at the Gallery is that the competitor architects were told that they must leave intact the existing additions to the Gallery. In other words, faced with an opportunity to tear down a collection of ugly excrescences which, on their own admission have been unable to make work properly, and build something spectacular that does not take open land and does not encroach upon the view of Mrs Macquarie's Point, and does not take a big bite out of the tree line they squibbed it. At a meeting with Ann Flanagan, when the sheer expanse of the available galleries and the sheer expansion of the gallery over 16 years was pointed out, she said "Yes, but our researches show that 10% of visitors only come into the top floor and don't go down further". That is either an indication that the building is hopelessly designed and should be redone, or that the management is hopeless at enticing crowds, and managing crowd flow. It is no reason to destroy precious vegetation and build an undistinguished collection of pavilions on a prime site.

#### A very poor and undistinguished design

33. And then one looks at the designs, in particular the indicative designs from the firm chosen by the judging panel. Acres of open space are closed in only by plate glass windows with not a shred of a spot to hang art. What art galleries need is inward-facing spaces, mostly flat, and well-lit, rarely with natural light (unless it is properly controlled and because it is generally speaking bad for the art works). What an art gallery does not need is open spaces, harbour views, restaurants, cafés and roof terraces. The vast majority of the National Gallery in Canberra has no external windows. Sir Roy Grounds' National Gallery of Victoria building is a rectangular stone block with no outwards windows. Palaces that are converted in Europe to become great galleries have their windows covered over by exhibition walls. Views are sacrificed, where they exist, for art. But mostly galleries are built with no views, for example within city blocks.



## Tendentious reasons why going east and south was not considered

34. The obvious solution if the Gallery must extend is to go east and south, not north. At one point the Royal Botanical Gardens Trust had plans of building a five star hotel over the Domain Car Park playing fields, but that seems to have been abandoned. Apparently a major reason against moving the extensions so that they extend east and south rather than north and northeast is that one of three or four heritage Moreton Bay fig trees in the area would have to be removed. Well that's a pity, of course, but the removal would at least be for a purpose. Sydney has had to tolerate the removal of the entire circle of Moreton Bay figs around the Archibald Fountain, and the entire row of Moreton Bay figs along Hospital Road, with no properly planned replacement planting over, the last few years. One "heritage" tree needs to be put into context.
35. Sydney Modern will be a blot upon the landscape. It is ill-conceived and it is being ill-executed. It starts with a completely wrong design brief – that the existing ugly extensions should be preserved. Further aspects of the design brief, with Orwellian sleight of tongue, propose the concreting over of grassy, green spaces and the destruction of trees. It seeks to eat deeply into the precious Domain/RBG precinct and to encroach on the Harbour.
36. More recently the AGNSW website has said: "By building to the north of the existing Gallery we are preserving one of our two 19th-century facades, protecting our heritage trees, and retaining the Domain's much-used playing field".
37. Again, all false premises. If they didn't build at all, or built to the east by demolishing the rag bag of ugly additions they have added over the years, or built to the south with a clever addition that incorporated the southern façade, there would be no threat to it. They in fact save only one important tree by not building south; the build over the top of open green space and demolish existing tree lie by going north. Every tree is precious but magnificent trees have had to go in the western Domain, and throughout Hyde Park, in recent years for safety, and dozens are being cut down just for a tram line in Randwick. (Notably, the AGNSW accepts that it might not be able to save the tree concerned.)
38. And they are "retaining the Domain's much-used playing fields". That's very generous of them. Since when did they have the power to do anything to those

fields. I'm going home tonight to have dinner, and by the by I'll retain trial by jury for indictable offences while I'm at it – equally a nonsense and a non-sequitur.

39. The fact is by demolishing everything other than the original Andrew Andersons' extension, by building cleverly eastwards including with a further land bridge over an ugly section of the Eastern Distributor, by extending south-eastwards over the railway line and by extending south over some or even all of the Domain Playing Fields are far better solutions, if the extension must be on the present site, than the proposed solution. Indeed, an artfully designed extension covering the whole of the Domain carpark but with a grassed over roof would not take playing fields away at all but offer far greater flexibility to the AGNSW in the design of a new extension.
40. Of course, as other submissions have pointed out with great eloquence, the better solution is for any further space managed by the AGNSW to be on a completely different site.

#### Traffic

41. I am a resident of Lincoln Crescent. There are no doubt both positives and negatives (once the construction period is over) to our residences at Lincoln Crescent by the building of the extensions. The positives are almost all unrelated to art – there will be, e.g., cafes and roof terraces and the like which might increase the amenity of the neighbourhood to some degree. However, part of the proposal is that Lincoln Crescent be a working vehicular entrance for the running of the Art Gallery. Lincoln Crescent is a dead-end the entrance to which is at a frequently choked intersection where traffic flow comes to a complete halt as soon as there is any build-up of traffic on the Bridge or in the Tunnel. Every Friday afternoon, and at frequent other times, it can already take 10 or 15 minutes to get into Lincoln Crescent which, as a resident, is unavoidable. Presently there must be a maximum a hundred or so vehicle movements in Lincoln Crescent each day. The AGNSW proposal has more than a thousand vehicle movements in and out of Lincoln Crescent every day. That is untenable.

#### Conclusion

42. The application should be rejected.

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